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# Too love to Support: the Moderating Effect of Place Attachment in Resident Attitude Formation

Ye Chen

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## **Too love to Support: the Moderating Effect of Place Attachment in Resident Attitude Formation**

Based on the social exchange theory (SET), studies have shown that the more positively the impacts of tourism are perceived by the host population, the higher their support for tourism development (e.g. Ap 1992; Gursoy and Rutherford 2004; Styliadis et al. 2014). However, it seems that SET alone hardly captures residents' values and cannot fully explain the relationship between residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and their attitudes toward tourism development. This study will use SET and place attachment as the theoretical basis to explore residents' attitudes towards tourism.

### **Literature Review**

According to the attachment theory (Bowlby 1969; 1973; 1980), attachment is the process that links one person with another in close relationships (Shaver and Mikulincer 2012). In the psychology literature, place attachment refers to a kind of emotional link between the self and a place (Gross and Brown 2006; 2008; Kyle et al. 2004). Despite extensive efforts on the subject, no consensus has been reached on the effects of residents' place attachment on their attitudes towards tourism. We argue that one reason behind the lack of consensus seems to be the measurement. We speculate that place attachment using more emotion related items will affect their attitudes.

Based on existing research of the relationship between the impacts of tourism and residents' attitudes toward tourism (Ap 1990; Gursoy and Rutherford 2004; Gursoy et al. 2009; Jurowski et al. 1997), the hypotheses are proposed as following:

**H1a** The perceived economic impacts of tourism have a positive effect on residents' support attitude to tourism development.

**H1b** The perceived sociocultural impacts of tourism have a positive effect on residents' support attitude towards tourism development.

**H1c** The perceived environmental impacts of tourism have a positive effect on residents' support attitude to tourism development.

More attached residents may be better territorial guardians (Felson 1987). And some studies have indicated that the longer residents have lived in a community, the more negative their attitude toward tourism development becomes (Allen et al. 1988; Liu and Var 1986; Sheldon and Var 1984). We proposed that:

**H2a** Residents' place identity has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived economic impacts of tourism and residents' support attitudes towards tourism development.

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**H2b** Residents' place identity has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived sociocultural impacts of tourism and residents' support attitudes towards tourism development.

**H2c** Residents' place identity has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived environmental impacts of tourism and residents' support attitudes towards tourism development.

**H3a** Residents' place dependence has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived economic impacts of tourism and residents' support attitudes towards tourism development.

**H3b** Residents' place dependence has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived sociocultural impacts of tourism and residents' support attitudes towards tourism development.

**H3c** Residents' place dependence has a negative effect on the relationship between perceived environmental impacts of tourism and residents' support attitudes towards tourism development.

## **Methodology**

This study was conducted in China where tourism develops very fast. The constructs in our study were measured by 5-point Likert-type scale, and the respondents were asked about their level of agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Perceived economic impacts were measured by five items adopted from existing literature (Gursoy and Rutherford 2004; Stylidis et al. 2014). Four items were used to measure perceived sociocultural impacts (Gursoy and Rutherford 2004; Stylidis et al. 2014). Perceived environmental impacts were evaluated via four items (Gursoy and Rutherford 2004; Stylidis et al. 2014). The items measuring place attachment were based on the work of Williams and Roggenbuck (1989), Kyle et al. (2005). Finally, tourism support attitude was measured by one item as "I will support tourism development in this city".

The survey was conducted on a market research website in China ([www.sojump.com](http://www.sojump.com)), and a hyperlink to the site was posted on major social media platforms in China, such as Sina Weibo, Tencent Weibo, and Wechat. We used a convenience sampling approach and choose Beijing, Tianjin, Hangzhou and Xi'an as our sample cities. The survey lasted 5 months from Nov. 2014 to Mar. 2015, and a total of 526 responses were received. We followed Li (2012)'s recommendation and calculated the average time respondents spent to finish the survey and eliminated those who spent less than 90% of the average length. This resulted in a total 411 valid responses.

## **Results**

We used SPSS 20.0 to check the singularity and multi-collinearity, and found no

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significant differences between the four city samples. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to evaluate internal consistency. The constructs in this study attained high value of 0.86 and above, demonstrating good internal consistency.

From the regression analysis for moderating effects of place identity, we conclude that residents' perceived economic impacts and sociocultural impacts are positively related to their attitudes to tourism development ( $\beta=.905$ ,  $t=9.262$ ;  $\beta=.858$ ,  $t=9.115$ ), and place identity has a significant, negative moderating effect on the relationship between perceived economic impacts, sociocultural impacts and residents' attitudes to tourism development ( $\beta=-.397$ ,  $t=-2.331$ ;  $\beta=-.366$ ,  $t=-2.131$ ). So H1a, H1b, H2a, H2b are supported. We find that residents' perceived environmental impacts are not positively related to their attitudes towards tourism development, and place identity has no significant moderating effect on environmental impacts, so H1c and H2c are not supported.

The regression analysis for moderating effects of place dependence shows that place dependence has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between perceived sociocultural impacts, perceived environmental impacts and residents' attitudes towards tourism development ( $\beta=-.486$ ,  $t=-2.824$ ;  $\beta=-.462$ ,  $t=-2.702$ ). So H3b and H3c are supported. Because the moderating effect of place dependence is not significant on the relationship between perceived economic impacts and residents' attitudes towards tourism development ( $\beta=-.285$ ,  $t=-1.734$ ), H3a is not supported.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

In this study, we combined the social exchange theory with place attachment theory to explore the relationship between residents' perceived tourism impacts and their attitudes toward tourism development. We found out that the residents' emotional bond to local place has an important effect on their attitudes. The two dimensions (place identity and place dependence) of place attachment are both positively related to residents' attitudes toward tourism development.

Except the environmental impacts, the moderating effects exist on the relationship between economic impacts, sociocultural impacts and residents' attitudes. This indicates that place attachment can involve and reduce the effect of perceived benefits of tourism on residents' supportive attitude towards tourism development.

In addition to supporting conclusion of some existing research (Um and Crompton 1987; Lankford and Howard 1994), this study also makes two additional theoretical contributions: First, we verified the important role of attachment theory in explaining the relationship between residents' perceived tourism impacts and their attitudes toward tourism development. Second, this study found out the direct and moderating effect of place attachment on residents' attitudes toward tourism development.

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